

U.S. Opens 'Air Action' Against N. Viet-Nam



President Johnson is shown at the White House last night as he announced new U.S. air action against North Vietnamese gunboats and supporting facilities to curb hostile attacks against U.S. Naval vessels.

order he was giving was aimed only at those facilities "used in these hostile operations" of the attacks on U.S. vessels during the previous three days.

President Johnson did not specify in his address where the American attacks were taking place, although additional details about his decisions were to be provided in post-midnight official briefings.

The official news of the latest attack yesterday on U.S. vessels off the North Viet-Nam coast came at 6 p.m. in a Defense Department announcement calling it "a second deliberate attack."

Again it was repeated that there were no American casualties or damage. It was believed that at least two Communist PT boats were sunk and two others damaged, out of six or more attacking vessels.

Yesterday's attack was double the scale of the first shooting encounter on Sunday in the Gulf of Tonkin, off the North Viet-Nam coast. This time, in a three-hour night battle, attack aircraft from the American carriers Ticonderoga and Constellation joined in beating off the torpedo boats.

The new assault added major dimensions to what appeared to be a whole new pattern of boldness by the Communists in challenging overwhelming U.S. naval power in the Pacific.

On Sunday the United States took the position that the first attack on the destroyer Maddox, that reportedly occurred about 28 miles from the Viet-Nam coast in international waters, may have been an "isolated incident." The second attack was much farther out in international waters—65 miles—the Defense Department said.

Even before the second attack came, the United States warned North Viet-Nam yesterday that it took an "extremely serious view" of the original attack on the Maddox.

In an unprecedented message sent to North Viet-Nam, with which the United States has no diplomatic relations, the State Department said that "any further unprovoked, offensive military action against U.S. forces" could have "grave consequences."

Shoot-to-Kill Orders

President Johnson on Monday had given the U.S. Navy new shoot-to-kill orders as a result of the Sunday attack on the Maddox. He ordered the naval patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin doubled, and it was

the destroyer U.S.S. C. Turner Joy that joined the Maddox that was attacked with it yesterday.

The President also ordered a "combat air patrol" over the destroyers. That order brought to the scene the giant U.S. aircraft carrier Constellation, joining the carrier Ticonderoga which had helped beat off Sunday's attack on the Maddox.

Early yesterday, the Constellation and three other American warships, the guided-missile frigate Gridley and the destroyers Preston and Fechteler, steamed out of Hong Kong harbor.

The Defense Department's official announcement of the second attack, issued at 6 p.m. yesterday by Assistant Secretary of Defense Arthur Sylvester said:

"A second deliberate attack was made during darkness by an undetermined number of North Vietnamese PT boats on the USS Maddox and USS C. Turner Joy while the two destroyers were cruising in company on routine patrol in the Tonkin Gulf in international waters about 65 miles from the nearest land.

"The attack came at 10:30 p.m. local time (10:30 a.m., Aug. 4, Washington time).

"The PT boats were taken under fire by the destroyers and thereafter by attack aircraft from the Ticonderoga and the Constellation.

"The attackers were driven off with no U.S. casualties, no hits and no damage to either destroyer.

"It is believed that at least two of the PT boats were sunk and two others damaged."

Fight in Bad Weather

Defense officials said that during the three hours of battle there were some lulls and new attacks. The weather was described as "miserable," with rough seas, an 800-foot ceiling and scattered thunderstorms.

The first attack was described as having taken place at the geographical location of 19 degrees, 10 minutes North, and 107 degrees East, or some 30 to 40 miles south and a little east of the first attack on Sunday.

Officials denied reports that there were Communist planes in the air. They said that only planes from the two aircraft carriers were in operation. The Ticonderoga is a World War II 33,000-ton vessel. The Constellation is a 60,000-toner, completed in 1961.

The PT boats were said to have fired torpedoes, reportedly scoring no hits. Because of the darkness, the bad weather, and the swirling at-

tack, American officers do not know exactly how many PT boats were engaged, although some reports referred to six.

Most of the damage to the PT boats probably was done by destroyers, it was thought, as the American jet pilots could see little in the dark.

When officials were asked how they knew the attacking boats were North Vietnamese, they replied "We're satisfied" that they were. Officials expressed similar conviction in Sunday's attack, while declining to disclose their precise method of identification.

The authoritative "Jones Fighting Ships" says North Viet-Nam has 16 Soviet-built P4 torpedo boats. If that is correct, they presumably have lost at least one and possibly more on Sunday when three attacked, and two to four yesterday.

After news of the second PT-boat attack in the Gulf of Tonkin reverberated around Washington, there was a rush of policy conferences at the State Department, Pentagon and White House.

Then the President, facing the greatest international test of his Administration, called in the National Security Council for a decision at 6:15 p.m.

This challenge for President Johnson embraced a broad combination of international uncertainties over an anti-Communist conflict where more than 16,000 U.S. servicemen are already serving in South Viet-Nam, with several thousand more on the way.

Next, the President called in the leaders of Congress to tell them of his decisions in a 90-minute meeting.

President Johnson met yesterday in a regular meeting with the National Security Council at noon. He then had a pre-scheduled lunch with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and McGeorge Bundy, the President's special assistant for national security affairs.

Members of the Senate who met with the President last night were Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (Mont.), Republican Leader Everett M. Dirksen (Ill.), Senate Majority whip Hubert H. Humphrey (Minn.), Foreign Relations Committee Chairman J. William Fulbright (Ark.) and the ranking Republican on that committee Bourke B. Hickenlooper (Iowa), Armed Services Committee Chairman Richard B. Russell (Ga.) and that committee's ranking Republican, Leverett Saltonstall (Mass.), and Sen. Thomas H. Kuchel (R-Calif.).

Department Press Officer Robert J. McCloskey announced the expected protest

note sent to North Viet-Nam over the attack on the Maddox on Sunday.

The note charged that country with interference with United States rights to operate freely on the high seas "in accordance with the rights guaranteed by international law to vessels of all nations."

The note warned that the United States "will continue to do so and will take whatever measures are appropriate" for its defense. It said North Viet-Nam should be "under no misapprehension" about the "grave consequences" which would inevitably result from any further unprovoked offensive military action against U.S. armed forces.

McCloskey said the note was sent to Saigon, the capital of South Viet-Nam, for transmittal to Hanoi, the capital of the North Viet-Nam "regime," "through appropriate channels."

The United States never before has sent a diplomatic note to North Viet-Nam. Officials said it was hoped that the message would be transmitted by the International Control Commission in Viet-Nam, composed of representatives of India, Canada and Poland.

Questions Raised

The great questions confronting United States policymakers are these: Were the North Vietnamese, perhaps encouraged by their Chinese Communist allies, deliberately trying to provoke the United States into a direct retaliatory attack on North Viet-Nam? If so, what is the motivation, in view of the fact that the United States obviously can bring superior air and naval power to bear against North Viet-Nam?

Is the objective to risk an American attack on, say, Hanoi, the capital of North Viet-Nam, in order to confront the United States with the choice of attacking a city or being labeled "a paper tiger," as Peking charges it is? Or is there a more devious maneuver involved, aimed at both the United States and the Soviet Union, whose brand of "peaceful coexistence" with the West is detested by Peking?

American officials who have been debating these questions since the first attack, now are under much greater pressure to come up with a conclusion since the second attack ruled out the "isolated incident" premise. Many were convinced from the outset, despite the official policy line, that the first attack indicated the pattern that the second attack proved.

Hanoi Accuses U.S.

Radio Hanoi in its first comment on Sunday's attack on the USS Maddox said early today that the incident occurred in North Vietnamese territorial waters.

"Out boats came into action to protect our territorial waters and our people and to chase the enemy ship out of our waters," the radio said.

It accused the U.S. Seventh Fleet of aggressive action and said the United States was attempting to cover up its "aggression" with a story of a so-called unprovoked attack by North Vietnamese boats.

The broadcast contained a warning that North Viet-Nam would take the necessary steps in case of further American aggressive acts.

There was no comment from Communist China.

North Viet-Nam on Sunday charged that the United States and South Viet-Nam had sent warships "to shell the Hon Me and Hon Ngu islands in the territorial waters" of North Viet-Nam. Those islands are near the area where the Maddox was attacked Sunday. Hon Me is used as a naval base, American sources said, and Communist PT boats have been seen in the area.

The United States has denied that any of its warships shelled the islands of Hon Me and Hon Ngu. However, despite some reports published yesterday, the State Department denial did not equally exculpate South Viet-Nam. It only denied American participation.

Speculation on Attack

There are some indications, however, that the South Vietnamese may in fact have attacked the two islands. American officials have declined to discuss that, although U.S. warships on occasion reportedly have escorted South Viet-Nam vessels part-way to their targets.

On Monday, Sen. Richard B. Russell (D-Ga.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said there had been South Vietnamese naval activity in the Gulf of Tonkin. He did not specify the action except to say that it may have caused some "confusion" on the part of North Viet-Nam, leading to Sunday's attack on the Maddox.

U.S. officials, however, were explicit on that point. They said they had no reason to believe Sunday's attack was the result of accident or confusion in any way. The second attack yesterday appeared to confirm that.